

DECISION NOTICE  
AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR THE  
**Management Indicator Species  
Forest Plan Amendment 04**  
to the Routt National Forest Land and Resource  
Management Plan – 1997 Revision

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests

Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Moffat, Rio Blanco & Routt Counties, Colorado

February 2007

**Lead Agency:**

**USDA Forest Service**

**Responsible Official:**

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## SUMMARY OF DECISION

### Decision

Based upon the analysis and evaluation described in the *Management Indicator Species Environmental Assessment (EA)* and associated record, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action as described in the EA. This decision will modify the current management indicator species (MIS) list in the Routt National Forest (RNF) Land and Resource Management Plan 1997 Revision (Forest Plan). This decision modifies the number of MIS on the RNF from twenty-four (24) to six species which will result in improved efficiency and effectiveness of monitoring and a closer link of species selected to management issues identified.

The Proposed Action was developed through the completion of the Routt National Forest (RNF) Management Indicator Species (MIS) Review (EA, Appendix A). This review of the Forest's MIS program was based on the *Region 2 MIS Selection Process and Criteria* (Hayward et al. 2001). The Proposed Action revises the existing MIS list based on the recommendations from the RNF MIS Review. This modification retains four (4) species, adds two (2) species, and removes twenty (20) species from the current MIS list. These species were selected because they are considered more appropriate as MIS and population monitoring data on these species are more likely to answer specific questions related to management issues facing the Forest.

Management indicator species are selected to monitor the implementation of the Forest Plan and assess if current Forest Plan management direction is adequate to provide for wildlife. This decision revises the current MIS list to include the following species: golden-crowned kinglet, northern goshawk, vesper sparrow, Wilson's warbler, Colorado River cutthroat trout, and brook trout. This modified MIS list is better aligned with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) 1982 planning regulation, as clarified by Region 2 direction, and ensures that monitoring will be conducted on species for which monitoring population trend is most feasible and useful, and that monitoring is focused on major management issues that have the potential to affect species.

This decision does not change the monitoring and evaluation requirements that are outlined in chapter 4 of the Forest Plan. It does, however, change the description of how MIS monitoring would be conducted and the questions that the monitoring is intended to answer. The FEIS of the Forest Plan on pages 3-122 to 3-123 describes a process that would compare population information gathered largely in partnership with or predominately by the Colorado Division of Wildlife to wildlife habitat capability outputs or HABCAP outputs (HABCAP is a specific analysis program). The FEIS states that:

“MIS will be monitored in cooperation with state fish and wildlife agencies by comparing the HABCAP capability outputs (baseline FY98) and Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) population estimates. An MOU with the CDOW will be pursued to establish available population data for MIS.”

My decision revises the approach currently outlined in the FEIS for the Routt Forest Plan planning area. It is my decision that the Forest will develop three MIS monitoring protocols that will outline how the monitoring will be conducted. One protocol should be developed for the songbird MIS including the golden-crowned kinglet, vesper sparrow, and the Wilson's warbler. One protocol should be developed for monitoring the northern goshawk, and one protocol will be developed for monitoring the two trout species, the Colorado River cutthroat trout and the brook trout. The protocols should be designed to determine the Forest population trend of MIS species and evaluate if changes to that trend are related to the major management issues facing the Forest.

The above modifications require an amendment to the Forest Plan. I have determined that this amendment does not significantly change the Forest Plan, in that there are no changes in management direction, (goals, objectives, standards or guidelines) and it does not affect any Forest Plan outputs, such as goods or services. The impacts of the selected action are not significant and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

This action applies to all the National Forest System (NFS) lands included in the Routt National Forest planning area, which includes the Williams Fork portion of the Arapaho National Forest.

### **Rationale for Decision**

I have decided to select the Proposed Action as described in the *Management Indicator Species Environmental Assessment (EA)* because its implementation will result in improved efficiency and effectiveness in monitoring a more appropriate set of MIS, and will improve our ability to detect population trends and clarify the associated management issue. In making this decision, I considered applicable laws, regulations and policy, recent Region 2 direction regarding MIS selection, and the information disclosed in the EA, the Forest Plan, and the planning record. I considered how the alternatives meet the stated Purpose and Need for Action (EA p. 3) and address the Key Issues identified (EA pp. 6-7). I also considered public and agency comment.

The stated ***purpose and need*** for the proposed action is to amend the Forest Plan with a revised MIS list that is better aligned with the planning regulation as clarified by Region 2 direction, to ensure that monitoring is conducted on species for which monitoring population trend is most feasible and useful, and to ensure that monitoring is focused on major management issues that have the potential to affect species.

I have selected the Proposed Action because it would more adequately implement and better meet the intent of the MIS program by focusing monitoring efforts on a small set of species and specific management issues. It will also utilize available funding more efficiently and effectively. Of the individual management issues that MIS were thought to be able to effectively evaluate, these species were determined to be most suitable to monitor in order to help answer the associated questions.

The 2005 Routt National Forest 5-year Monitoring and Evaluation Report acknowledged a need to amend the MIS list to be consistent with Regional direction and guidance (p.46). This action responds to Forest Plan direction (p. i-4) to amend the Forest Plan when evaluation of monitoring results reveals that the Plan needs to be changed.

## **Major Management Issues Facing the Forest**

Although numerous issues were identified, six issues were chosen to represent the major fish, wildlife, and rare plant management issues and challenges currently facing the Routt National Forest to be evaluated through MIS monitoring. The following species were identified to address these issues: (1) Colorado River cutthroat trout and brook trout for aquatic habitat fragmentation; (2) golden-crowned kinglet for spruce-fir timber management; (3) northern goshawk for lodgepole pine timber management; (4) vesper sparrow for rangeland residual forage; (5) Wilson's warbler for herbivory in riparian areas; and (6) Colorado River cutthroat trout and brook trout for sedimentation of riparian areas and aquatic habitats.

The issue of the distribution and abundance of late seral Forests was again carefully reviewed following comments received on the Draft EA. Currently there are 281,692 acres of late seral lodgepole pine and 237,385 acres of late seral spruce-fir on the Routt National Forest. Sixty-two percent of the late seral spruce-fir forest and 51% of the late seral lodgepole pine forest is located in roadless areas and/or wilderness areas on the Routt Forest that are well distributed across the Routt National Forest.

Pandemic bark beetles are anticipated to affect all of the late seral spruce on the Routt Forest and 50% of the high hazard lodgepole and 25% of the moderate hazard lodgepole (US Forest Service 2002 Bark Beetle EIS). More recent analyses have estimated greater losses in the lodgepole pine, specifically 90% of the high hazard stands and 50% of the moderate hazard stands (US Forest Service 2003, Green Ridge Mountain Pine Beetle Analysis). Recent monitoring of beetle infestations does indicate that most late seral lodgepole pine may be affected by mountain pine beetle activity, however the spruce bark beetle epidemic shows a slowing trend that may indicate less of an impact than originally anticipated. The Williams Fork portion of the Arapaho National Forest covered under the Routt National Forest plan and included in this analysis is also experiencing similar mortality in late seral lodgepole pine.

Although there are several large scale projects being implemented in timber management areas on the Routt NF and in the Williams Fork of the Arapaho National Forest, the concern from the public tends to focus on how the Forest Service manages an outbreak rather than the natural disturbance process itself. Given that the primary concern relating to this issue is the response of forest vegetation management actions in late seral forest conditions, it was thought to be more appropriate to consider an MIS for the issues related to 'lodgepole pine timber management' and 'spruce-fir timber management' as those issues are directly related to our management actions that can be more effectively controlled through guidance provided in the Forest Plan. The issue of the distribution and abundance of late seral forests is largely a result of natural disturbance actions and beyond the control of the National Forest and therefore this issue was determined not appropriate for evaluation through MIS monitoring.

Two of the selected MIS species, the golden-crowned kinglet and the northern goshawk, occur in the forested cover types that are experiencing epidemic bark beetle outbreaks and we recognize their populations may be affected by these natural disturbance processes as well as management actions. Monitoring protocols will be developed to make the distinction of whether changes in species population trend are a result of Forest management actions or larger scale factors that affect state or regional population trends. This will be done by comparing the forest population trend to the population trend at a larger spatial scale such as the state or region. Through this comparison, if the species are declining at the same rate at both the Forest level and the regional level, then it would be assumed that the cause of the decline would be attributed to a larger scale factor beyond the control of the Forest, such as regional bark beetle activity. This decline could be evaluated through analysis of the data.

### **Rationale for Species Not Selected**

Through the comprehensive evaluation of major management issues and possible MIS species (EA, Appendix A), the Proposed Action was the only alternative developed in detail. Other species considered are documented in Appendix A of the EA. The consideration of various combinations of species could lead to an unreasonably large number of alternatives that do not serve to meet the purpose and need for this project. Appendix A of the EA outlines the process used in formulating the proposed action and summarizes the consideration of other species and species groups as MIS.

Many other species were thoughtfully evaluated during the Routt MIS Review process. Some species, including the American three-toed woodpecker and American marten, did receive considerable evaluation as to whether or not they should be included in the decision.

The American three-toed woodpecker was considered in detail in the analysis and has been used as a 'surrogate' MIS in project level analysis on the Routt National Forest (US Forest Service 2002, Bark Beetle EIS). The Bark Beetle EIS provides a thorough examination of this species' suitability as a management indicator and uses it as such. However for Forest level monitoring of management issues that are within the control of the Forest Service (as opposed to the project level analysis presented in the Bark Beetle EIS), it was decided that since this species has cyclical population responses that are driven by natural disturbance, monitoring the species would not inform the Forest how to change its management. The American three-toed woodpecker populations are increasing across the planning area as habitat increases with the spread of the bark beetle epidemic and will continue to do so until the epidemic is finished and then the population is expected to decline, as its habitat is driven not by snags, but rather by insects. It is not apparent how monitoring this trend would result in changes to our Forest Plan or management in relation to an issue (natural ecological disturbance created by large scale beetle epidemics) that is largely beyond the management control of the Forest Service.

Like the American three-toed woodpecker, the American marten and the boreal owl have also been used as indicators in project analyses related to management of bark beetles (US Forest Service, 2002, Bark Beetle EIS).

The American marten was considered in detail as an MIS as described in the EA, Appendix A and Appendix B. Marten have been monitored through a snow track transect and baited camera stations approach that has been implemented intermittently as required in the Bark Beetle EIS and blowdown salvage logging EISs. These monitoring programs are anticipated to continue as specified in the associated project level NEPA documents and decisions. However, in the environmental analysis, only one issue-- 'spruce-fir timber management'--was suitable for MIS monitoring with marten, and in the evaluation it was determined that the golden-crowned kinglet was a better indicator for this issue for the reasons described in the EA.

The boreal owl was not considered in this analysis because it was not listed as an MIS on the existing MIS list or found on a neighboring planning unit as outlined in the process described in Appendix A of the EA. The boreal owl has been used as a surrogate MIS during project level NEPA (US Forest Service 2002, Bark Beetle EIS). The Bark Beetle EIS predicts that the Forest population of the boreal owl is anticipated to decline with loss of mature spruce trees. As with the American three-toed woodpecker, this is anticipated to be a normal population response to a natural disturbance event. With this species, it too is not apparent how monitoring this trend would result in changes to our Forest Plan or management in relation to an issue that is largely beyond the management control of the Forest Service. A boreal owl nest box program was started in 1998 and continues to the present. Subsequent monitoring has demonstrated that even with establishment of hundreds of nest boxes across the Forest, it is difficult to get an adequate number of nesting boreal owls to allow for an estimate of population and trend. Based on the existing monitoring and improved understanding of MIS this species is not a suitable MIS as its species characteristics match criteria 1 and 3 as described in the Appendix A process.

## **Key Issues**

The following key issues were identified through scoping, and from intra- and interagency discussions:

***Suitability as an MIS and ability to monitor:*** Species selected as MIS should be suitable as management indicators and those that are not suitable should be considered for removal from the existing MIS list. Species selected as MIS should be feasible and reasonable to monitor population trends effectively at the scale of the planning area. The monitoring efforts should be efficient and not duplicate other efforts. The availability of data to reveal species responses to management issues, or ability to collect it, is a fundamental factor to be considered.

***Meaningful indicators:*** The monitoring of species selected should be able to answer the questions associated with major management issues facing the Forest. Regulations clarify that species will be selected because their population changes are believed to indicate the effects of management activities. For some major management issues, alternative monitoring approaches may be preferred over MIS in order to more clearly obtain the needed information.

## **Response to Key Issues**

Based on Regional direction for identifying MIS, the Routt National Forest conducted a review of the existing MIS. The goal of the review was to determine the suitability of the existing MIS as management indicators and the practicality of monitoring population trend at the scale of the planning area for each species based on species biology, available methodologies, cost, and effectiveness. The review also helped focus MIS monitoring on major management issues facing the Forest. The proposed species were then considered in relation to major management issues facing the Forest that could be effectively evaluated through the use of an MIS monitoring approach.

The RNF MIS review found that several species on the existing MIS list do not clearly meet the criteria as appropriately functioning as MIS. Populations of several MIS are strongly influenced by factors beyond the control of land managers. As a result, for some species, population changes are difficult to interpret in relation to forest management. Other species may function as a MIS, but monitoring their populations does not help answer the questions associated with the major management issues.

## **OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL**

### **Alternative 1 – No Action**

Under the No Action alternative, no changes would be made to the current MIS list and implementation of this alternative would not involve preparation of a Forest Plan Amendment. The 24 species identified in the Forest Plan represent eight habitat complexes and the individual species associated with one or more of the complexes. Individual habitat complexes are represented by three to eight species. See table 3-48 of the Forest Plan FEIS located on page 3-125 for more detail (USDA Forest Service 1998b).

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

This proposal was listed in the January 2003 Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) and each subsequent quarterly report.

On March 22, 2006, a scoping letter was sent to approximately 217 interested individuals, agencies, and organizations. This letter described the purpose and need for the action, and included a table of existing MIS and the retention/removal/addition recommendations. The letter included a 30-day opportunity for written responses from those wishing to comment and/or from those interested in future mailings about this action. As part of the public involvement process, a legal scoping notice describing the proposed action and purpose and need for action was published in the *Laramie Boomerang* and *Steamboat Pilot* on March 26, 2006. During scoping eight written responses were received, all of which included comments pertinent to the proposed action being considered.

Using the comments received during scoping, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of key issues to address. On August 16, 2006, a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was mailed to those who had expressed interest or requested the document. A legal notice was published in the *Laramie Boomerang* on August 18, 2006, requesting public comment on the EA. In addition, a public notice was published in the *Jackson County Star* and the *Steamboat Pilot*, and the Draft EA was posted on the Forest website. Four comment letters were received. Responses to these comments can be found in the Final EA, Appendix B.



## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities in the Environmental Assessment prepared for the Routt Forest Plan MIS Amendment. I have also reviewed the project record for this analysis and the effects of the proposed action and alternatives as disclosed in the EA. Implementing regulations for NEPA (40 CFR 1598.27) provide criteria for determining significance of effects. Significant, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity. My determination on whether the proposed action may have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment is based on consideration of the following:

***(a) Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27):***

The disclosure of effects in the EA found the actions limited in context. The decision to amend the Forest Plan is limited to lands administered by the Routt National Forest, which includes the Williams Fork portion of the Arapaho National Forest. Effects are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

***(b) Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluation of intensity (40 CFR 1508.27):***

- (1) Environmental Effects – This amendment does not propose or dictate any ground-disturbing activities, therefore there are no environmental effects associated with the action. Direct and indirect effects are discussed in the Environmental Consequences section of the EA, pp. 20-24.
- (2) Public Health or Safety – The amendment does not affect public health and safety.
- (3) Unique Characteristics of the Area – There are no adverse effects to historic places or loss of scientific, cultural, historical, or other unique resources created with this plan amendment.
- (4) Controversy – The effects of the amendment on the various resources is not considered to be highly controversial by professionals, specialists and scientists from associated fields of forestry, wildlife biology, fisheries and hydrology, etc. I do not believe that there is significant controversy over the effects of this project.
- (5) Uncertainty – The effects analysis for this plan amendment shows the effects are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risks.
- (6) Precedent – This amendment does not establish a precedent for future action with significant effects.
- (7) Cumulative Impacts – There are no cumulative effects on the environment created by this amendment. (Refer to Environmental Consequences section, p.23.)

- (8) Properties on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; significant resources – This amendment will have no significant effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The amendment will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
- (9) Endangered or threatened species – This amendment will not adversely affect endangered or threatened species or their habitat. (Refer to Environmental Consequences section, p. 20-24.)
- (10) Legal requirements for environmental protection – This amendment complies with other Federal, State or local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based upon the review of the test for significance and the environmental analyses conducted, I have determined that the Routt Forest Plan MIS Amendment is not a major federal action and that its implementation will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared for this amendment.

## **FINDING OF NON-SIGNIFICANT AMENDMENT**

NFMA implementing regulations require me to determine whether a proposed Forest Plan amendment would result in a significant change in the Forest Plan. It is important to note that the definition of significance for amending a Forest Plan is not the same as the definition of significance defined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for project level analysis. Factors to be considered in determining if a proposed amendment is significant include: 1) timing; 2) location and size; 3) goals, objective and outputs; and 4) management prescriptions. Other factors may be considered, depending on circumstances.

**Timing** - This amendment will become effective seven days from the publication of the legal notice for this decision and will apply until changed by subsequent amendment or revision.

**Location and Size** – This amendment will apply to all National Forest System lands included in the Routt National Forest Plan planning area, which includes the Williams Fork portion of the Arapaho National Forest. However, this amendment is administrative and programmatic in nature and has no physical, biological or social effects.

**Goals, Objectives and Outputs** – This amendment would not affect any of the goals, objectives or outputs stated in the Routt Forest Plan. This amendment does not prevent the RNF from achieving any of the Forest Plan's goals and objectives because it only changes which species will be monitored at a forest-wide scale. In addition, the changed list does not prevent attaining any of the outputs defined in the Forest Plan as the outputs are not dependent on the content of the MIS list.

**Management Prescriptions** – This amendment will not make changes to nor have an effect on management area prescriptions. This amendment will not change the desired future conditions or alter management direction for the Routt National Forest planning area.

**Finding and Conclusion** – The above documents the evaluation of this amendment to the RNF Forest Plan in context to the significance factors as described in FSH 1909.12 (5.32(3)). Based on considerations of timing; location and size; goals, objectives and outputs; management prescriptions; and other provisions of NFMA, I find the selected alternative will not constitute a significant amendment to Forest Plan for the Routt National Forest planning area.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

**Archaeological Resources Protection and National Historic Preservation Act** – The programmatic nature of this decision causes no ground disturbance and, therefore, will not cause any harmful effects to archaeological, historic, or cultural resources.

**Clean Water Act** – The Clean Water Act requires Federal agencies to comply with all Federal, State, interstate and local requirements, administrative authority, and process and sanctions with respect to the control and abatement of water pollution. This amendment does not affect water quality because the programmatic nature of this decision causes no ground disturbance.

**Endangered Species Act** – This amendment complies with the Endangered Species Act. Implementation of the proposed action will have no effect on any federally-listed threatened, endangered, or proposed species.

**National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** – NFMA requires the development of long-range land and resource plans (Forest Plans). Per NFMA it is appropriate to amend the Forest Plan as need dictates. Per NEPA, a non-significant amendment can be analyzed in an environmental assessment. This decision to amend the Forest Plan was determined not to be a significant amendment requiring an EIS (see “Finding of Non-significant Amendment” above). This decision is consistent with requirements of NFMA and NEPA.

## Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Federal regulations at 36 CFR 217. A written appeal, including attachments, must be submitted within 45 days following publication of the notice of this decision in the *Laramie Boomerang*, the newspaper of record. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Send appeals to:

USDA Forest Service, Region 2  
Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer  
PO Box 25127  
Lakewood CO 80225-0127  
FAX: 303-275-5134  
Email: [appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us)

It is the responsibility of those who appeal a decision to provide sufficient written evidence and rationale to show why my decision should be changed or reversed. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 217.9, which state:

- State that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217
- List the name, address, and telephone number of the appellant
- Identify the decision about which the requester objects
- Identify the document in which the decision is contained by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official
- Identify specifically that portion of the decision or decision document to which the requester objects
- State the reasons for objecting, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy, and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy
- Identify the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks

## Implementation Date

Implementation of the project may begin on, but not before, the 7th calendar day following the publication of the notice of this decision in the newspaper of record (36 CFR 217.10).

## Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Robert Skorkowsky at 925 Weiss Drive, Steamboat Springs CO, (970) 870-2146.

/s/ Mary H. Peterson\_\_\_\_\_

**MARY H. PETERSON**

Forest Supervisor

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests &

Thunder Basin National Grassland

February 2, 2007\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

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